



The Assessment Process: Presenting Nontraditional Career Options to Women

Most women do not know about tradeswork, technical occupations, or the apprenticeship system and have no paid work experience in these areas. In only a few instances will a female client sit down with a career counselor and say, “I want to be a carpenter.” However, while the majority of women have never thought about doing non-traditional work and do not have paid work experience in a non-traditional job, one-third probably have skills or interests that are transferable to non-traditional work.

When assessing women’s aptitude for and interest in nontraditional occupations, you can draw out some of these transferable skills by asking the following questions:

- What are your hobbies and interests? Do you enjoy building or repairing things? If so, follow up with detail questions about what she has done and help her to see her experience transfers into skills for specific entry-level jobs for which your program trains/places.
- Do you do any redecoration work around the house? If so, do you enjoy it? “Let me tell you about house and interior painting as a career.” (Describe wage, career ladder, entry-level requirements, and training available.)
- Have you ever fixed something that was broken? For example, a toilet, a toaster oven, or a sewing machine? If so, how did you feel after you fixed it? Describe mechanical and electro-mechanical careers for which your program trains/places.
- Do you work in your garden, or have you lived on a farm or a ranch? Describe what kinds of things you have done. Describe landscaping jobs, laborer positions, etc.
- Do you have a driver’s license? Have you ever driven a school bus, a truck, or a trailer? Can you drive a standard shift automobile? Describe careers in the transportation industry.
- Have you ever worked on your car? Changed a tire or the oil? Replaced the spark plugs? Describe jobs such as automotive technician and auto body worker and training opportunities in these fields.
- Have you ever used hand tools? What about power tools? Have you ever used a vacuum? If so, then you have used a power tool.
- Do you sew at all? If so, did you know that following a sewing pattern requires the same skills as reading a blueprint for building a house or a schematic drawing for repairing a copy machine?

Frequently, when women are asked if they’ve ever fixed anything that was broken, they say no. But when prompted with specific examples, such as “What happens when the faucet in your apartment leaks or the plaster cracks?,” women will say, “Yes”. In fact, they did fix this or that.

The client will feel empowered when she realizes that some of the little things she does around the house on a daily basis could translate into a potential career.

The Assessment Process

When presenting non-traditional job options to women, make the following key points:

- Describe potential jobs in detail, indicating the entry-level wage and career advancement opportunities, and describe the training necessary to obtain these jobs, the length of training, the cost if any, support services available, and entry-level training requirements.
- Explain the apprenticeship system. Most Americans — but women in particular — are unfamiliar with this method of training.
- Offer to put the client in touch with the role models working in nontraditional jobs.
- Discuss both the benefit and barriers for women working in nontraditional jobs. Let the client decide what is best for her.
- Assist the client in overcoming her math fears, if necessary. Many women are afraid of doing math, but once they start doing it again, as an adult, they may enjoy it.
- Mention the possibility of joining a support group for women who are in nontraditional training and jobs. If the client is interested in pursuing nontraditional work, but is afraid her family and friends will not support her decision, let her know that other support systems are available.

Source: *Promoting Non-Traditional Career Options and Opportunities*, Kansas Competency-Based Curriculum Center, Topeka, KS, 1999.